

COLUMBIA LIBRARIES OFFSITE  
AVERY FINE ARTS RESTRICTED



AR01551000

*THE CHIEF END OF  
BOOK MADNESS*

*BY LAWRENCE C. WROTH*

# Ex Libris

SEYMOUR DURST

*t' Fort nieuw Amsterdam op de Manhatans*



FORT NEW AMSTERDAM

(NEW YORK), 1651

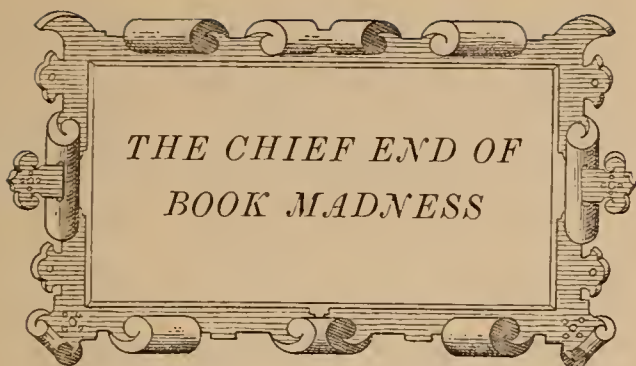


When you leave, please leave this book  
Because it has been said  
"Ever'thing comes t' him who waits  
Except a loaned book."

0466485 BOY 69

AVERY ARCHITECTURAL AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY

GIFT OF SEYMOUR B. DURST OLD YORK LIBRARY



WHETHER he is to sell his library or preserve it intact for the benefit of an institution is the question that forces itself upon every book collector of consequence when one day he realizes, suddenly perhaps, that his collection is becoming important and that the term of years allotted him is beginning to be fulfilled. In most instances the decision is out of his hands. The purchase of books over an extended period has seemed a minor drain upon his income as long as the channel was open at both ends, but now that he is thinking in terms of estate rather than of income he concludes regretfully, and often much to his surprise, that his library is an important item in the list of tangibles upon which the economic future of his family must rest. There is nothing for it but to sell the books himself or to leave his executor directions for their sale. He is fortunate if he may do this without pain, fortunate if he has not loved too greatly this thing he has built up through his creative energy, his knowledge, and his taste.

Comfort has been provided this collector, however, by generations of predecessors in like situation. They have passed on the word to him that his decision to sell will bring great joy to the world of bookmen, assuring him vehemently

7  
76  
159  
that he will be giving others the opportunity of happiness through the purchase of his books. They even tell him that the books themselves will be happier going about from collector's library to auction room and bookshop and back again to collector's library than if they remain in guarded ease upon institutional shelves. "It is better to be a crystal and be broken," they say, quoting the old Chinese proverb, "than to remain perfect like a tile upon the house top." They remind him of the passage in the will of Edmond de Goncourt providing that his collections should not "be consigned to the cold tomb of a museum . . . but dispersed under the hammer of the Auctioneer, so that the pleasure which the acquiring of each one of them has given me shall be given again . . . to some inheritor of my own tastes." Soon the act of necessity begins to take on in his mind the likeness of a virtue, an act of unselfish benevolence.

There is, in truth, no need for this rationalization. All the world accepts financial necessity as valid reason for the sale of a library. It is important, anyhow, that there should be book sales and many of them. The dispersal of private libraries through the auction room is the life of the book trade. It replenishes the stocks of booksellers, stimulates collectors, establishes standards of price which measure the esteem of certain literary categories and of individual books and authors, and, finally, it provides the book world with matter for gossip and sharp intelligent discussion for weeks before and after the sale.

If we admit that in general this dispersal of private libraries is natural and right, the health of the trade, we must not fail to claim our exceptions. Most collections that come to the auction room are destined to the auction room from the beginning. They are aggregations of books rather than collections, the work of men to whom collecting has been a hobby rather than a passion. Brought together with half the owner's mind, they consist, too often, merely of miscellaneous high spots. They are unrelated in their elements, devoid of that quality of synthesis, of integration, which

creates the dynamic force of a true collection of literary materials. But when a collection formed purposefully and with the abandon of the true book madness comes to the point of dispersal we feel genuine pain, the pain and shock which come from seeing a perfect thing broken to bits.

We have always in memory classical examples of dispersals of libraries which should have been kept intact. In its possession of source materials relating to British North America and the United States, the Brinley library was the completest and most imaginative of contemporary public or private collections. The possession of it as a whole would have enhanced the usefulness of the libraries of Harvard or Yale or the Library of Congress, or would have made the reputation and established the power for effective service of any smaller college library in the country. But this was not to be, and what happened may have been for the best. This greatest of Americana sales enriched many libraries. Harvard, Yale, and the Library of Congress were heavy buyers. At the sale of Part I in 1879, James Lenox retrieved some of his errors of omission and bought largely of things he had not previously had the chance to acquire. John Russell Bartlett bought many books for the library of the recently deceased John Carter Brown. The Brinley purchases by Levi Z. Leiter and Ogden Goelet were seen to be one of the distinguishing features of the Leiter and Goelet libraries when half a century later those fine Americana collections came upon the market. Here was the democratic process in full operation, a general enrichment of the cultural life of the nation. Yet reading the five George Brinley sale catalogs, a frugal-minded man experiences regret that so great an integration of materials, so fine a synthesis of knowledge should have been shattered and its elements dispersed, regret that the opportunity was lost for the creation of still another notable center for the study of American history and life. Mr. Randolph Adams concludes his fine study of George Brinley in his *Three Americanists* with reflections of the sort set down here, presenting to his readers the axiom that in the case of

an integrated collection "the whole, in the estimation of some of us, far outweighs the value of the sum of the parts. In a great book auction sale, it is this synthesis that is lost. . . . The auction enables others to select books and put them in their proper homes. But still, when an auction occurs, there is tragedy, because the great creative work of the collector has to be begun all over again."

A recent small drama in my own experience leads me to speak of another instance of dispersal which has about it the element of tragedy. This was a drama of coincidences. A bookseller left with me at the John Carter Brown Library an early manuscript of the *Historia de las Indias* of the Bishop Las Casas, a volume which bore upon its fly-leaf the magic inscription—Phillipps Ms. 14136. Looking for a place of temporary safekeeping for the precious volume I opened a bookcase in which, flat upon the shelf, lay a manuscript which had been for several years in the Library's ownership and was now awaiting its turn with the photographer. I placed the new volume upon the old and was about to close and lock the door when a bell began to ring somewhere in my subconscious memory. I took both manuscripts off the shelf and, truly enough, upon the one already owned by the Library I read in the well-known and unmistakable hand—Phillipps Ms. 24158. By one chance in many thousands I had placed together two manuscripts which for a long time had stood near each other in a great private library across the seas until their separation some thirty years ago. Then came the next coincidence. While I wondered which of the many Phillipps sales these two had come from, my eye fell upon a Sotheby catalog which a day or two before had been brought out for a purpose now forgotten. It was the catalog for the Phillipps sale of May 19, 1913. Within the space of a few breaths I had learned that both pieces had been sold in London the same day thirty-two years ago as Nos. 27 and 453 in that catalog. By this time I was prepared for anything in the way of coincidences, and I was soon to learn that the series was not complete. The Las Casas manuscript bore

upon its covers the arms of Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay. With small hope of finding it, I went in search of the Stuart de Rothesay sale catalog and, almost doubting my eyes, found that the first in our run of Sotheby catalogs was that for the fourteenth and fifteenth days' sale of the Stuart de Rothesay collection on May 31, 1855, and further that in it, No. 4017, was the Las Casas manuscript. That catalog was marked in many places with the vigorous and characteristic check mark of John Carter Brown, and soon I had before me, reunited, the Las Casas manuscript and a fine group of other books bearing the Stuart de Rothesay arms, which Mr. Brown had bought at that sale ninety years ago.

All this could lead to but one end, the purchase of the Las Casas manuscript. Even if its intrinsic importance had been less, the accidental reunion of these Phillipps and Stuart de Rothesay pieces had so touched the chord of sentiment and superstition which runs through all collecting that I would not have dared decline the purchase.

This is a long, and perhaps an idle, introduction to a few words of regret that the Phillipps collection, or a considerable part of it, should have been dispersed. For a moment following the incidents just related I entertained the idea of trying to bring together in one place all the scattered Phillipps manuscripts, but realizing at once that such an idea was within the lunatic fringe of bibliomania, I contented myself with thinking what a grand project it would be to make a census of the present locations of all Sir Thomas's manuscripts scattered throughout Europe and America through the agency of the eighteen sales held in the period 1886-1928. Few tasks could be more engrossing, more time-consuming, and, some might say, more useless. But that would be a hard saying and an untrue one. Never could the Phillipps manuscripts be brought together in one place in their own bodies, but to bring their titles together on paper with an indication of their present locations would be one of those acts of bibliographical grace for which scholars of the future would bless one's name if scholars should ever

reach the state of appreciating their debt to bibliographers and collectors. But with this reflection my little drama came to an end, for immediately I recalled that Lathrop Harper had once told me that Seymour de Ricci long ago planned to do the very thing which had just occurred to me as a bright and sparkling idea. Let us hope that before his death three years ago in occupied Paris, Mr. de Ricci made progress with a task which he alone of all men could successfully have carried out.

In his *English Book Collectors*, De Ricci tells us that at one time Sir Thomas Phillipps contemplated the sale of his collection *en bloc* to the British Museum, but that the transaction fell through because the price offered was too small. That is a black mark for somebody. Here were 60,000 manuscripts of all sorts covering many centuries of human thought, probably the greatest collection of manuscript materials of history and literature ever brought together by a private individual. Today some 20,000 of these are still in the family library; the remainder are found everywhere. Of the illuminated liturgical manuscripts, for example, several are among the finest specimens in the Pierpont Morgan Library. A notable group of portolan atlases, breath-taking examples, are proudly held by the Henry E. Huntington Library. Every scholarly institution in this country boasts a great or small number of Phillipps manuscripts upon its shelves. They have gone about doing good, but the question is, wouldn't their impact in well-doing be greater if they were concentrated under one administration than it is now when they are scattered up and down the library shelves of the world? One certain thing is that in their present state their use is unrestricted. At one time, it is said, Sir Thomas planned to give the whole collection to a minor English college with the provision that no Catholic should be allowed access to it. Clearly he didn't like Catholics, yet an astonishing proportion of his manuscripts were of interest to Catholic historians, or, certainly, to the historians of Catholic countries. A group of Phillipps manuscripts now in

the John Carter Brown Library, relating to Spain in North America, was described and calendared a few years ago by a Franciscan scholar whose work was sponsored by a Catholic foundation.

The other side of the dispersal picture, the side which portrays the fortunate man who can afford to be generous, is encouraging to those of us who collect few books for ourselves but whose lives are given up to collecting books in order that our great libraries may grow in distinction. Such as we do not need to be convinced of the important function of the collector as the builder of libraries. All about us we see what has been accomplished for the public good by the private man whose book collection, unbroken, has gone by gift or purchase to an institution.

In the life of the collector destined to become one of the great library builders there arrives inevitably the moment when he realizes that he has created something larger than himself. Most of his contemporary associates and rivals have begun acquiring books with undefined purpose, with nothing more serious in view, perhaps, than quiet hours of relaxation at the fireside after the day's work is done, a personal resource and escape from care and responsibility. That is the normal collector's beginning and end. But it is another man we have in mind. With our man this gentle and always respectable pursuit suddenly, or gradually, as the case may be, has become the dominating force in life. Collecting engrosses him more and more, book madness seizes him, he becomes *fou*, he finds that he is going to his office or his factory for quiet relaxation and to his fireside for the stern business of life. He buys and buys again, filling out old subjects, opening new fields, exhausting himself and straining his resources. One day he stands off and takes stock of what he has done. He realizes that through the demon which possesses him a new potentiality of influence has been born into the world. Happy is he if in this state of awareness he can plan to make permanent the new force he has created!

With some collectors the idea of a benevolent disposition

of their books seems to have been an animating motive from the beginning. The late Tracy W. McGregor loved and read and pondered the matter of every book he bought. Collecting was his relaxation and a stimulant to his ever-broadening mind and sympathy, but with the selflessness which was his characteristic, he held from the outset of his interest in books, I believe, the idea of enriching some library by the results of his activity. With most collectors, however, this decision is a matter of slow growth. James Lenox had been collecting zealously for twenty-five years when he caused to be incorporated "The Lenox Library" as a public institution. Henry Stevens leads us to believe that the burden of the great library had become too much for Mr. Lenox, but there must have been at work subtler impulses towards benevolence as well as the realization that this synthesis of knowledge he had achieved was too fine a thing, too nearly perfect, to be wantonly broken into pieces. Early in his career as a collector John Carter Brown, made uneasy by rising prices, dallied with the idea of selling his books. Fortunately he did nothing towards that end, and soon he was in a new frenzy of collecting. The visits of historians to his collection awakened him to the realization of its value. He opened his doors to scholarly visitors and began the publication of the handsome and useful catalogs which were to make widely known at home and abroad the resources of his notable collection of Americana. His widow and his son, John Nicholas, added to the collection, and slowly the son awoke to the certainty that this body of books customarily referred to by him in boyhood, half in jest, as "*La Grande Bibliothèque*" had now assumed a significance which demanded a guaranty of perpetuation. In his will he provided for the foundation of "The John Carter Brown Library," in the words used by his trustees, "As a library to which all proper students shall have access for study." These were men who did not intend that, paraphrasing Mr. Adams's words, the whole great creative work of the collector should have to be begun over again. In the present century Henry

E. Huntington carried on his collecting with the zest of a man who has found new worlds to conquer and ended it with a large and effective gesture of benevolence. J. P. Morgan inherited his father's superb collection, increased it by notable additions, and finally established it as a public institution "for the use of learned men of all countries." For the long remainder of his life he continued to add generously to its resources and in his daily association with it experienced happiness in observing how continuously and how truly the books which he and his father had gathered were serving the ends of the learned men to whom he had opened the doors. What a roster of names that shine in the annals of book lore this might become even if it were confined only to American names, omitting from it Pepys, Bodley, Ashburnham, Spencer, and others of English fame. In times like these such a roll call is a consolation to the reflective man.

The question the historian of this and the last century will ask himself when he considers the libraries of the United States will not be "What has the book collector done for these libraries?" but "What would these libraries have been without the book collector?" He would perceive after some scrutiny of their foundations and growth that in their composition was mingled the almost indefinable quality of "distinction," bringing at least a score of them close to the level of the best of their kind in Europe. In these American libraries this quality could not have been attained with restricted public or institutional funds in so short a period of time. It was given them through the zeal and knowledge and rash expenditure of the private collector.

If this historian were to turn his appraising eye to the Far West, he would see in the Library of the University of California a great collection on the natural history, anthropology, and political history of the Pacific Slope. These were the materials brought together by Hubert Howe Bancroft as the source material for his several series of massive volumes on that area, and after that initial use acquired by

purchase in 1907 by an enlightened state government. We can't think of Bancroft as a collector in the sense of his being an "amateur," a lover of books. But even though his interest was utilitarian, he was nevertheless a great amasser of books and historical source materials. The printed books and pamphlets of his library, the original manuscripts and the transcripts of archival material in Spanish and Mexican depositories have made that university a productive center of studies relating to the Far West and the Spanish Southwest. A greater breadth was given California's special collections when in 1934 the University of California at Los Angeles received by legacy the William Andrews Clark, Jr. collection of works of English literature of the Restoration period and later centuries, and of nineteenth century American literature and local history.

In the years between the acquisitions of these two integrated book collections, California had become one of the world's centers of literary interest. In the 1920's Henry E. Huntington took to his home at San Marino the great collection of books he had formed in the preceding twenty years through purchase at auction, purchase from booksellers, and purchase from other collectors of whole libraries on special subjects. In none of these purchases would Mr. Huntington be denied. For those years he had dominated the world's book markets. The formation of his library of English and American literature, of English history, of American history, of incunabula, of manuscripts, and of works relating to the history of art was, perhaps, the most notable feat of collecting the book world has ever known. The dissolution of it at auction would have provided bookmen with a point of reference for a century to come. Fortunately in this case the exigencies of estate settlement did not require liquidation of the collection. Mr. Huntington was able to give it in his lifetime to the community from which his wealth had been drawn. He enriched that community in the eyes of the world in a sense and to a degree not to be measured by the dollars and cents he had spent in

the course of his resistless sweep through the book markets.

In 1918 the University of Texas acquired by purchase the collection of seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century English literature formed by John H. Wrenn. A good many years later the University bought the collection of books and manuscripts on the early history of New Spain made in the nineteenth century by the celebrated bibliographer, Joaquín García Icazbalceta. Here, made to order, were aggregations of literary and historical materials which at the slow rate and frequently interrupted progress of institutional collecting might never have been equalled by their new owner in size or quality. The two collections have given the Texas library that quality previously designated as "distinction."

It is a dramatic thing, it seems to me, that the West should have acquired these great libraries almost while it was still a frontier, and that it should have received them in many instances from the men or the sons of the men who had cut its trails, built its roads and railroads, and had been among the first to dig the gold and silver from its hills. In the Newberry Library of Chicago is the collection of Edward E. Ayer, whose life as an aggressive young business man led him for long periods into the Southwest, and whose reading had awakened in him an enduring curiosity about the Spanish empire in North America, the American Indian, Hawaii and the Philippines, the French, English, and Dutch in America, and the general subject of early geography. Supplying the crossties upon which were laid the tracks of transcontinental railroad systems was one of the enterprises which enabled Mr. Ayer to form a noble library of books, manuscripts, maps, and transcripts relating chiefly to the subjects named. To these he added many works of general American history as well as a notable collection of editions of the *Geographia* of Claudius Ptolemy.

As we move eastward new names appear upon our roster. William L. Clements dug iron out of the Michigan earth and gave back gold to the people of his state in the form of

the library which he collected lovingly, studied, wrote about, and finally made available to all scholars. The William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, beautifully and substantially housed in a separate building, and administered by its own staff, is an institution which has brought to its midwestern community an important collection of general Americana previously lacking in that section of the country. It was a fortunate institution, too, in that Mr. Clements established it in his lifetime and thereafter acquired for it large collections of manuscript materials on the American Revolution, which advance knowledge and understanding of an all-important period in the history of the country. Today when one thinks of sources for the study of the Revolution there comes inevitably into his mind the associated idea of William Lawrence Clements and the library he established at Ann Arbor.

Becoming interested in American history and in its foundation books through the medium of the library established by Mr. Clements, Tracy W. McGregor late in life began to form a library which soon contained many thousands of the general works of modern publication necessary to the student and with them a smaller group of the choice foundation books of the earlier period. He acquired *en bloc* the notable collection of the works of the Mathers of New England formed by Mr. William Gwinn Mather, a collection which had already served a great purpose as the basis of the series of Mather bibliographies compiled in the grand manner by Mr. Thomas J. Holmes. In his lifetime Mr. McGregor showed the extent of his belief in what he was doing by the establishment and management of a fund designed to aid smaller college libraries in the collecting of those rare foundation books of American history which their own resources would not permit them to acquire. At his death his own library went to his trustees who, some years later, gave the entire collection to be maintained as a library of American history by the University of Virginia. Through that gift the Charlottesville institution, the foun-

dation of Thomas Jefferson, has become an important center for American studies in a part of the country where the materials for such studies had not previously existed in strength and number.

Reading in Carl Cannon's admirable *American Book Collectors* and in various library histories, one realizes to what length this list might be prolonged. One of the earliest names on it is that of Isaiah Thomas, a printer's apprentice at six years of age, who through a life of courage, industry, and intelligence became a first citizen and in 1812 established the American Antiquarian Society upon the strong foundation of his own collection of Americana. The Brown University Library is able to lay before the student a rich store of materials for the study of American poetry because Caleb Fiske Harris, a Providence merchant, brought together some five thousand items on that subject which, after his death, were purchased for the University by Henry Bowen Anthony, and which the University authorities have sedulously added to until its present 140,000 books, broadsides, pieces of sheet music, and manuscripts make the original collection look small by comparison. It is rare in library history that a gift of genuine importance is allowed to languish by its new institutional owners. There is something about excellence that demands an increase of excellence. The growth of the Harris collection notably affirms this truth.

Another Providence institution that came into being through the zeal of a collector is the Annmary Brown Memorial established by General Rush Hawkins so that scholars might have access to the collection of incunabula he had brought together to show the dissemination of printing in the first half century after its origin. At Williamstown, a part of the library of Williams College, is the separately housed collection of Alfred Clark Chapin, composed, so far as its fastidious owner could make it possible, of fine examples of great books in the fields of incunabula, Americana, and literature. Against the background of the great

collection of scholarly works at Yale stand, mentioning only recent gifts, the Franklin collection formed by Mr. William Smith Mason and the notable library of early medicine formed by Dr. Harvey Cushing. At Harvard the special collections are so many that to mention one or two of them would be invidious. Its rare book collections in the Houghton Library are a congeries of private collections integrated with the whole. Its great general library has as its heart the collection of Harry Elkins Widener, a small collection made by one cut off in youth, but a group of books whose influence upon the growth of the Harvard libraries has been dynamic in character. At Princeton a recent gift and a recent legacy have enlarged the horizons and increased the distinction of library and college: the Islamic, Western European, Greek, Persian, and Indo-European manuscript collection of Mr. Robert Garrett, and the all but immaculate collection of nineteenth century English poets and novelists of Morris L. Parrish. The John Work Garrett legacy of collections of works on natural history, early voyages, colonial Maryland, American history, incunabula, and literature has given a broader scope and a new responsibility to the Library of the Johns Hopkins University. The gifts to the New York Public Library of the Ford collection of works on American history, the historical print collection of the late I. N. Phelps Stokes, and the Berg collection of English literature have added to the continuously growing distinction of that center of literary and artistic studies. The Spencer collection of fine books, the George W. Arents tobacco collection, and the William Barclay Parsons collection of railroad literature have further diversified the interests and magnified the reputation of that great library built upon the collections of James Lenox and the beneficence of Astor and Tilden.

The Library of Congress was founded upon the activities of a book collector, or perhaps we should say a library builder, for Thomas Jefferson—book buyer, friend of learning, and studious devourer of books—had little about him

of the bibliomane, the amateur. He wanted the best, fullest, and most scholarly editions of books in all fields of knowledge, an end not commonly sought by the true bibliophile, who wants everything on one subject or a small group of subjects and to whom a book is a thing endeared for certain qualities, or accidents, in some instances, not always associated with the idea of textual merit. Peter Force, whose books and manuscripts form the solid base of the Library's riches in American history, was a true collector even though his great library had been brought together as a work of utility. John Boyd Thacher with his nine hundred and four specimens of incunabula, not to mention his distinguished Americana of the Discovery Period, laid the foundation for what has become one of the world's notable sources for medieval and Renaissance learning, that is, the incunabula collection of the Library of Congress.

A new factor of interest was given the Library of Congress incunabula when to the great texts of literature, religion, and science in the Thacher legacy and the Vollbehr purchase were added the illustrated fifteenth century books brought together by Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald. The Rosenwald books, indeed, are no less concerned with high matters than those in the collections just referred to, but with them textual importance is only one element of interest. Their special grace is that they arouse the emotion of delight in the beholder through the medium of their vigorous illustrations, those woodcut illustrations of the fifteenth century which are neither primitive nor unsophisticated but in which the artist has unerringly separated essentials from the things which are unimportant and has translated his clear vision of the image directly into strict and simple line. That is a form of art which moves to enthusiasm the artist, the historian of art, and the amateur of the book.

The recently installed exhibition of specimens selected from the Rosenwald collection is a striking display of illustrated incunabula, especially when it is remembered

that this is not a loan exhibition made up of specimens from many libraries but a selection from the possessions of a single library. The series of publications now begun by the Library of Congress reproducing in facsimile notable works in the Rosenwald collection will call renewed attention to the importance of the fifteenth century book in the history of art and the history of ideas. At the same time that Mr. Rosenwald transferred his incunabula to the Library he gave also his wonderful collection of books illustrated by William Blake, and several thousand works of reference related to the Blake and incunabula collections.

It was frequently said in the years following the depression that there would be no more great fortunes and no more great gifts to institutions. I am perhaps the only man living who has not made this assertion solemnly and with an air of prescience. Modestly I say I don't know about these things. But what I do know is that neither depression, legislative restriction, wars, nor high taxes can nullify the human instinct to collect innumerable objects of varying shapes, sizes, or purposes. All this past winter there has been forming under my eye, gathered by a six-year-old boy from many sources, including sidewalks and gutters, a collection of match folders which already has crammed and jammed the table drawer in which I formerly kept some articles of daily utility. A few years ago wise men were saying that it is impossible to rescind the law of fermentation. The instinct to collect, like the process of fermentation, cannot be put out of existence by legislation nor can it be deprived of its vitality by the frowns of those who are insensitive to its urge. As long as people collect and as long as there are books there will be book collectors. Just that long book collectors will be building new libraries and adding to old. What happens after that does not concern us.

LAWRENCE C. WROTH  
Librarian, John Carter Brown Library



